My Father's Keeper: Children of Nazi Leaders—An Intimate History of Damage and Denial. Stephan and Norbert Lebert. Translated by Julian Evans. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2001. 243 pp. $25.95, doth; $14.95, paper.

Reviewed by William J. Astore, United States Air Force Academy

What would it be like to be the son or daughter of Rudolf Hess, Heinrich Himmler, or Hermann Göring? How could one bear having a father who was a mass murderer and Nazi war criminal? Stephan Lebert addresses these and related questions in his insightful journalistic study of children of prominent Nazis. Following up on interviews conducted by his father Norbert in 1959, Lebert contacted Wolf-Rüdiger Hess, Martin Bormann Junior, and Niklas and Norman Frank (sons of Hans Frank, the brutal governor-general of Poland), as well as Gudrun Himmler and Edda Göring. The latter two refused interviews, but the sons cooperated. Their responses, together with those of Klaus von Schirach (son of the head of the Hitler Youth) and Karl Otto-Saur (whose father was Albert Speer's right-hand man), are instructive, intriguing, and disturbing.

Lebert shows there is much to be learned from these children. He begins with Wolf-Rüdiger Hess, only child of the Führer's Deputy. At his birth each *Gauleiter* had to send a sample of German soil from his district to be placed underneath Wolf-Rüdiger's cradle. Devoted to the memory of his father as a "martyr" to peace, Wolf-Rüdiger refused to serve in the German Army until his father was released from Spandau prison (he never was). Disturbingly, Wolf-Rüdiger plays down the enormity of the Holocaust, concluding that Jews were partly to blame for their fate. Wolf-Rüdiger's son is currently developing a web site to defend the legacy of his grandfather.

If aggressive defense and complacent denial typify the Hess response, aggressive offense and fanatical outrage typify the response of Niklas Frank. Frank penned a scathing condemnation of his father that included masturbatory scenes and graphic fantasies of patricide. Rather than being commended for his honesty in confronting his father's crimes, Niklas was roundly condemned within Germany for the intensity and tastelessness of his jeremiad. To his credit, Niklas admitted he was motivated by self-hate in that he perceives his father's weaknesses reflected in aspects of his own behavior.

A critical if more measured response comes from Martin Bormann, Jr. Christened Martin Adolf in 1930 with Hitler as his godfather, Bormann became a missionary priest after the war, asking to be posted to the Belgian Congo in conditions of dire poverty. In the early 1970s he quit his religious order and married. Now seventy, he lectures across Germany about the dangers of Nazi ideology. Bormann's life might be seen as a son's attempt both to condemn and atone for

the sins of his father while simultaneously honoring his memory, a distinction lost on Gudrun Himmler, who charged Bormann with sinful disrespect in criticizing his father.

In contrast to Bormann, Gudrun seeks to rehabilitate the reputation of her father. Her refusal to change her surname or deny her relationship to her father cost her several opportunities for advancement. Equally devoted to her father is Edda Göring, whose essay for her *Abitur* in 1958 was a phrase of Theodor Heuss's: "To forget is simultaneously a kindness and a peril." As Göring's only child, Edda was treated like a princess. Upon her birth her parents received 628,000 telegrams of congratulation. With such doting attention it is unsurprising that Edda has only kind words for the memory of her father.

Equally unsurprising is the voyeuristic interest of neo-Nazis, whether in pilgrimages to the Hess family grave or in invitations extended to Gudrun Himmler (who apparently derives considerable pleasure from attending neo-Nazi rallies). Norman Frank complains that as young boy in Argentina after the war, he was passed around by Argentine Nazis "like some sort of holy relic. Just because I'd once sat on Herr Hitler's lap." Requests from journalists plague Klaus von Schirach with irritatingly predictable regularity, leading him to protest, "we Nazi children are completely uninteresting. It's always others who read something into our lives retrospectively. There's nothing to be had from us ourselves."

Von Schirach's protestations to the contrary, Lebert succeeds in demonstrating the moral complexities of memory—the vexing and problematic emotional connections between irredeemably tainted parents and their children. Yet Lebert could show us more than he does. He disregards issues of age, birth order, and gender and how these affected (if at all) attitudes and responses of the children. Sons, it would appear, display a wider range of emotional responses to their fathers, from the unapologetic affection and devotion of Wolf-Rüdiger Hess to the existential and exorcising loathing of Niklas Frank. Lebert could also have expanded the discussions of the nature of memory or ideas of collective guilt in post-war Germany. Also needing greater development are notions of family roles and paternal authority within Nazi Germany. These Nazis appear to have been absentee fathers, busy with the business of killing, leaving mothers to raise the children (their proper maternal role in a patriarchal Reich). Did these children resent the absence of their fathers, or love them the more for it? After the suicide or imprisonment of their father, did they follow the lead of their mothers in coming to grips with their father's crimes? These questions are left largely unexplored. Incorporating provocative photographs, the book lacks a bibliography or index. It is nevertheless accessible, stimulating, and smoothly translated.